

School Counselors' Leading With Self-Compassion

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Abstract

Although school counselors are tasked with assisting others with emotional and mental health needs, there is a paucity of research that examines the training and development of school counselors in self-compassion interventions to handle their own emotional and mental health needs in leadership situations. To address the gap in the literature, a workshop was developed and conducted for school counselors. A series of t-tests ($n = 63$) were used to examine the impact of the training on school counselors' leadership awareness and self-compassion. Results from this study indicate that the workshop had a significant impact on school counselor leadership awareness' dimensions.

Keywords: school counselors, leadership, self-compassion, stress, workshops

School Counselors' Leading with Self-Compassion

There is limited research pertaining to how to educate school counselors on leadership in corporation with their awareness of coping strategies such as self-compassion to assist with the stress that comes with engaging in leadership tasks. The manuscript at hand aims to not only add to the growing research in school counselor leadership development but also helps to fill the gap in the research and literature in respect to the training needs of leadership awareness and the awareness of coping strategies (particularly self-compassion) for practicing school counselors. The manuscript provides insight in providing a professional development workshop that incorporates education and experiential activities recommended by professional literature on leadership and self-compassion.

Defining School Counselor Leadership

“Leadership is an essential skill for school counselors” (American School Counselor Association (ASCA), 2012, p.1). School counselor leadership is so important that in 2019, ASCA updated the school counselor's professional competencies and standards to emphasize that school counselors develop a mindset or belief that they are “leaders in the school, district, state, and nation” (p. 6). Regardless of whether a school counselor is formally recognized via a leadership title or position in a school, school counselors who engage in leadership practices make significant contributions to overall school effectiveness (Hines et al., 2017). Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) argue that leadership skills are required for school counselors to successfully serve their communities. School counselor leadership is needed to implement data-driven school counseling programs (Sink, 2009) and to engage in educational leadership inclusion,

collaboration, and systems change (Brown & Ayala, 2018; Hines et al., 2017; Janson et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2011) for the betterment of the student population served. Though it is clear that school counselor leadership is important, a clear definition of school counselor leadership has not always been clear (Young & Bryan, 2015). Shillingford and Lambie (2010) have stated that any definition of school counselor leadership should focus on “the notion of defining what school counselors do as a practice as opposed to a position” (p. 215). With both this and the ASCA mindset or belief that school counselors are leaders in mind, ASCA proposed the following definition in 2019: school counselor leadership is “a thoughtful, intentional approach around selection of strategies, activities, and interventions...to inform the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program” (p. 81). ASCA’s definition encourages school counselors to consider well-conceived strategies or “best practices” in informing their decision-making (ASCA, 2012, p.11). Young and Bryan (2015; 2018) conducted studies “to help school counseling professionals assess school counselor leadership practices for the purpose of designing... professional development” (p.3). Through an extensive literature review and their national studies, Young and Bryan (2015; 2018) found that school counseling leadership behavior and practices can be deconstructed into five components (or dimensions): professional efficacy, interpersonal influence, resourceful problem solving, systemic collaboration, and social justice advocacy. Professional self-efficacy refers to “school counselors’ confidence in their ability” (Young & Bryan, 2015, p. 6). Interpersonal influence is another important leadership characteristic, which refers to an individual’s or a school counselor’s ability to influence others. According to Young and Bryan (2015), system change is best described as

systemic collaboration in the school counseling field. Systemic collaboration refers to practitioners “actively working with stakeholders” to impact organizational (or school) systems positively (p. 6). Resourceful problem solving has to do with the “school counselors’ tendencies to effectively solve issues and seek amenable solutions to...obstacles” (Young & Bryan, 2018, p. 237). Social justice advocacy is the “practice of challenging the status quo to advocate for all students” (p. 6). For the purposes of our study, these school counselor leadership factors are used to “properly operationalize school counselor leadership and provides an instrument that can assess school counselors’ beliefs about their leadership practices” (p. 3).

The Stress of Leadership

Harms et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of “the relationship between leadership and stress/burnout” (p. 182). They confirm that “stress and leadership are inextricably linked with one another” and that “leader stress influences leader behavior” (p. 178). This may help to explain why school counselors report higher levels of burnout (i.e., prolonged stress) under authoritative leadership and would rather work under a leader who employs a participatory leadership style (Cummings & Nall, 1982; 1983). However, whether acknowledged as a leader or not, school counselors engage in stressful leadership practices (Fein, 2008). The ASCA definition of leadership emphasizes the importance of mental processing for engaging in best practices in implementing school-related “strategies, activities, and interventions” (p. 81). School counselors are called upon to become leaders, not only deciding on effective practices but also being assertive and consistently clarifying their appropriate roles and responsibilities (Bryan & Constantine, 2006; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Wilkerson & Bellini,

2006) as well as providing critical decisions and services during school crisis situations (Brown, 2019; Fein, 2008). McCarthy et al. (2010) conducted a study with more than 200 school counselors to assess the impact of such demands on their wellbeing. A primary implication made by the study “is that school counselors’ stress may be understood in terms of their perceived demands and resources for coping with work demands” (p. 156). Other researchers have found that the mental processing required for these tasks not only leads to “stress, exhaustion burnout, and avoidant emotional coping processes” but also causes school counselors to become overly self-critical or maladaptive perfectionists (Fye et al., 2018, p. 357). Harms et al.’s (2017) meta-analysis study on leadership and stress/burnout also raises important implications. Among these is the suggestion that leadership development or training should include a stress element, the primary aim is to make leaders “capable of operating under stress” (p. 185). An example of a targeted area in leadership training that addresses the stress element would be “developing...coping strategies” (p. 185). Self-compassion (and its associated components) has been shown to be a helpful coping strategy for counselors (Todd & Hiba, 2019; Patsiopoulou & Buchanan, 2011).

Self-Compassion and The Stress of Leadership

Self-compassion may be defined as a healthy, kind, and caring attitude that is reflected inward toward oneself in times of difficulty or suffering (Neff & Dahm, 2014). According to Neff’s (2016) research, self-compassion incorporates three primary components within positive and negative (or compassionate and uncompassionate) contexts. These components are “self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification” or,

simply stated in its positive context, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (p. 265). Self-kindness is the opposite of harsh self-judgment, constituting an approach that is “gentle, supportive, and understanding toward oneself” (p. 265). Common humanity is the acknowledgment that a person should not feel isolated because of his or her imperfections; instead, the person recognizes and understands “that all humans fail and make mistakes, that all people lead imperfect lives” (p. 265). Mindfulness is an awareness of the “present moment experience of suffering with clarity and balance, without being caught up in” the negative exaggeration of the self (p. 265). These components, particularly those that involve compassion or positivity (i.e., mindfulness, self-kindness, and common humanity) are also each considered coping strategies, and all of these components (compassionate and uncompassionate) help researchers to operationalize “the thoughts, emotions and behaviors associated with...self-compassion” of study participants (p. 265).

Researchers have shown that school leaders, including principals, teachers, and counselors, benefited from practicing self-compassion and or its related components (i.e., mindfulness, self-kindness, common humanity) as effective coping strategies in managing work stress (Frank et al., 2015; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011; Rufa, 2018). After conducting an extensive literature review and identifying stress as an integral part of leadership, Horton (2017) conducted a study to examine the impact of leadership behavior on individuals' self-compassion. The findings of the study indicated that leaders who are aware of their authentic and servant leadership style characteristics exhibited higher levels of self-compassion, wellbeing, and work satisfaction. Patsiopoulos and Buchanan (2011) conducted a qualitative study investigating self-

compassion in counselors, finding that, whether taking on a leadership role (e.g., as a supervisor or mentor) or working under unsupportive leadership, counselors deemed it necessary to practice self-compassion in association with their self-care. However, Todd's (2017) research reveals that school counselors lack understanding in practicing self-compassion as a self-care or coping strategy intervention. Thus, although self-compassion has been shown to be a helpful coping strategy for school counselors engaged in leadership practices, more research is needed regarding training and education (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011).

Training and Development

Since the call was raised for school counselors to become leaders (ASCA, 2012; Brown & Trusty, 2005), there has been an increasing demand for education, training, and development in the field of school counselor leadership awareness, practices, and skills (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009, 2016; Mason, 2010; Janson, 2009; Paradise et al., 2010; Young & Bryan, 2015). It is important that such leadership development includes elements that aid counselors in developing self-awareness and a positive view of themselves as leaders (Gibson, 2016; Young et al., 2015), allowing them to accept more fully their role as a school leader (Dollarhide et al., 2008). It would be beneficial for school counselors-in-training and practitioners to engage in self-reflection and consultation with one another to help them to envision working through probable conflicts and challenges they will face when engaging in school counselor leadership practices (Borders & Shoffner, 2003; Dollarhide et al., 2008; Shilling & Lambie, 2010). Meany-Walen et al. (2012) have made clear that "leadership expectations can be draining with unlikely sustainability" (p. 214),

and have conducted research that shows the importance of school counselors having the ability to self-care or cope when engaging in leadership behavior (Meany-Walen et al., 2012). This supports Horton's (2017) findings that suggest that leadership development training should include "effective coping strategies" for working through the stress that accompanies leadership practices (p. 185). Self-compassion has been shown to be a helpful coping or self-care strategy for school counselors (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011), and can be especially valuable to "mitigate feelings of stress" (Todd & Hiba, 2019, p. 19). However, more research, education, and training of school counselors in using self-compassion techniques as "specific strategies to incorporate into their work" are warranted (Todd & Hiba, 2019, p. 20).

Effective self-compassion training involves participants being led through various meditations, practicing "experiential exercises" as well as group-sharing and support (Neff & Germer, 2013, p. 859). Specific practices and exercises include the integration of self-compassion breaks (Neff, 2011), which are exercises in which one is asked to recall a moment of difficulty in one's life and is guided through the three components of self-compassion (mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness) through the integration of phrases that support each construct, in order to offer a new perspective and help them to relate in a more accepting way to their difficulty. Another exercise, known as "soothing touch" (Neff & Germer, 2013), involves the act of placing one's hand over the heart in order to soothe and comfort the body. A letter-writing exercise called "compassionate letter-writing" (Neff & Germer, 2013) requires participants to write a letter to themselves, addressing a life difficulty from the perspective of a dear good friend. The purpose of this letter is for the individual to begin to treat oneself as they

would treat a loved one when they are experiencing difficulties. Additional exercises can be found in Neff (2011).

The purpose of this pilot study is to assist in filling the gap in the research and literature regarding the need for training and development in the field of leadership awareness (i.e., school counselor leadership) and awareness of coping strategies, particularly self-compassion (Horton, 2017; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011; Todd & Hiba, 2019; Young & Bryan, 2018). The first and second authors created a three-hour and thirty-minute three-phase training program based on current research and professional literature. Phase one of the program educates participants regarding school counselor leadership practices and the connection between leadership and stress. Phase two educates participants regarding their beliefs and awareness of self-compassion techniques. Phase three educates participants regarding the use of self-compassion techniques and strategies in response to the stress of school counselor leadership practices. Before and after the training, we assessed participants' beliefs and awareness regarding their leadership practices and their levels of self-compassion. The researchers sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between school counselors' perceptions of awareness of their overall leadership and any of the dimensions of school counselor leadership, as indicated by the school counselor leadership scale, before and after receiving an intervention (i.e., a training program)?
2. Is there a significant difference between school counselors' perceptions of awareness of their overall self-compassion and any of the coping strategy

components related to self-compassion, as indicated by the self-compassion scale, before and after receiving an intervention (i.e., a training program)?

Methods

Institutional Review Board approval [1341429-1] was granted, allowing the investigators to employ a pre-experimental pretest-posttest research design (Houser, 2009). The authors believed this design would be beneficial in enabling all participants to take full advantage of the training by adopting a flexible approach to school counselor participants' work schedules. The investigators worked together to deliver two identical workshops at different times (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), each lasting for 3 hours and 30 minutes, to regional school counselors. Depending on which time frame worked better for their schedule, school counselors chose to either attend the morning session or the afternoon session. The workshop served as the primary treatment.

Participants

Participants in this study included elementary-, middle-, and high-school counselors from five school districts within the same region in the southwestern part of the United States. The first district is classified as a major urban district and serves a total of 57,315 students. The second district, also a major urban district, serves 46,814 students. The third district is classified as a major suburban district and serves 11,388 students. The fourth district is also a major suburban district, serving 6,246 students. The fifth district is classified as a rural school district and serves 843 students. The vast majority of the total student population in each of the five school districts identified as Hispanic/Latino (84% in the first district, 92% in the second district, 95% in the third

district, 93% in the fourth district, and 97% in the fifth district) (Texas Education Agency, 2019b).

Of the professional school counselors, 23 (or 15%) employed in the first district during 2018-19 attended the workshop. From the second district, 39 (or 33%) of the professional school counselors employed there during 2018-19 attended the workshop. From the third district, 27 (or 84%) of the professional school counselors employed there during 2018-19 attended the workshop. From the fourth district, 3 (or 21%) of the professional school counselors employed in there during 2018-19 attended the workshop. From the fifth district, 3 (or 100%) of the professional school counselors employed in the fifth district for 2018-19 attended the workshop (Texas Education Agency, 2019a). Overall, 95 (or 30%) of the sample of professional school counselors from all five school districts attended the workshop (see the data analysis section for effect size).

Based on the demographic information reported and those who chose to disclose this type of background information ($n = 68$), the descriptive statistics revealed that the gender distribution was predominantly female (66.2%) and that the majority of the participants identified as bilingual Hispanic/Latino (85.3%). Approximately 71% of the participants had between 3 and 15 years of experience as a professional school counselor, while only 4% had more than 20 years of experience. Elementary-school counselors constituted 50% of the participants, high-school counselors constituted 26.4%, middle-school counselors constituted 15.3%, and multilevel school counselors constituted the remainder. The majority of participants (98.1%) held a master's degree.

School counselor supervisors from each of the five surrounding school districts disseminated information on the Leading with Self-Compassion workshop. This recruiting procedure provided all school counselors with an equal opportunity to participate. With administrative approval, the participating school counselors chose to attend a half-day (morning or afternoon) workshop, which took place during school hours. School counselors may have self-selected to attend this workshop because they felt a need for more information on self-care as it related to their professional role as a counselor.

Consent was discussed with all the individuals in attendance. When an individual completed the survey, consent was assumed to be accepted; however, paper copies of informed consent forms were made available, and individuals had the opportunity to sign these forms. Of the 95 school counselors who attended the workshop, nine did not sign a consent form and opted not to participate in the study. Therefore, only 86 school counselors attempted to complete the surveys. Of the 86 surveys completed, eight survey packets (i.e., packets including informed consent, pre-surveys, and post-surveys) were incorrectly copied or put together. These survey packets were missing post-survey sheets that included the following: items 20-31 in the leadership survey and questions intended to elicit demographic information. Moreover, two participants completed the surveys at the beginning of the workshop but stated they had to leave early because of an emergency at their school and were unable to complete the surveys at the end of the workshop. Other participants left early or at the time at which post-surveys were to be completed but did not make their reasons known. It is plausible that they too needed to return to their campuses for work-related reasons, especially during

the second session, which concluded during the time at which schools were closing for the day. Because demographic information was elicited by the post-surveys, this data could not be collected for individuals who left before fully completing the post-surveys.

Instruments

The participants completed two valid and reliable instruments, or surveys, immediately before and after the training: the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) (Neff, 2016) and the School Counselor Leadership Survey (SCLS) (Young & Bryan, 2018). The School Counselor Leadership Survey (SCLS) (Young & Bryan, 2018) is a 31-item survey with an additional fill-in-the-blank item, which measures leadership behaviors and practices among school counselors and school counselor supervisors. The survey comprises five subscales: interpersonal influence, resourceful problem solving, systemic collaboration, social justice advocacy, and professional efficacy. This revised SCLS used confirmatory factor analysis to ascertain its internal factor structure and a validation study to confirm the use of these five sub-scales as best and build upon Young and Bryan's (2015) SCLS. To measure these five areas, this survey employs a 7-point Likert scale: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = sometimes, 5 = fairly often, 6 = very often, and 7 = always. Some examples of questions on this scale are as follows: "I accomplish goals with certainty and confidence"; "I have confidence in my ability to lead"; and "I actively work with stakeholders to implement comprehensive school counseling programs." The participants were asked to answer the questions in relation to their present behaviors as opposed to practices/behaviors they desired to adopt (Young & Bryan, 2018). Young and Bryan (2018) also reported high levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .82 to .89. In terms of the

extant validity information, the researchers in this study relied primarily on a study conducted and documented by the developer of the SCL scale (Young & Bryan, 2018). However, exploratory factor analyses for the present study using practicing school counselors ($n = 85$) were conducted to verify its internal factor structure for this particular sample. The preliminary results yielded a close match to the original scale psychometric findings in terms of extracted meaningful factors (five-factor model) with some items reporting below .30 factor loadings where their membership was expected. Even though the sample size for the present study was considered adequate (if not ideal), the overall variance explained by these five extracted factors was considered high (63%).

The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003) is a 26-item scale, which was used to assess participants' levels of self-compassion before and after the workshop and derives from the following six subscales: mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness, over-identification, self-judgment, and isolation (Neff, 2003). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = almost always to 5 = almost never. Some examples of the questions asked on this scale are as follows: "I am intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I do not like"; "I try to be loving toward myself when I am feeling emotional pain"; and "When I am down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am." High levels of internal consistency were reported by Neff (2003) in relation to the corresponding subscales: self-kindness, .78; self-judgment, .77; common humanity, .80; isolation, .79; mindfulness, .75; and over-identification, .81. The reliability for the total scale was $\alpha = .95$ (Neff, 2003). The SCS has also demonstrated a high level of internal

consistency in studies involving similar populations, including one involving graduate students in a counselor preparation program, which reported an alpha coefficient of .94 (Fulton, 2016). In terms of its validity properties, the developer of the scale examined its internal factor structure for the total scale and subscales. Their findings indicated that the best fit across three different types of samples was the 6-factor model (Neff, 2016). In a further examination of the factor structure using more than 20 countries' data, Neff et al. (2018) found a general factor that explained 95% of the reliable item variance. For the present study, exploratory factor analyses were conducted to verify the psychometrics for this sample regarding its 6-factor structure. The preliminary results indicated that extracted factors explained 64.4 percent of the variance and there was a close match in terms of the extracted number of factors; however, some subscale items loaded in more than one factor, though this may be due to the small sample of participants involved in this analysis ($n = 85$) and corroborated by the Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.784). Ideal values of this measure are typically expected to be in the low- to upper-nineties ($>.90$). Thus, the SC scale was deemed to be psychometrically solid and adequate for the planned analyses for this study.

Procedures

Two workshops, each with a duration of 3 hours and 30 minutes, were offered to regional school counselors on the same day and in the same place. One workshop was offered in the morning; the second workshop was offered in the afternoon. Participants had the opportunity to participate in either workshop, depending on their schedule. Two facilitators led the workshops. Facilitator A has more than five years of experience in leadership positions, providing leadership workshops, and researching leadership in the

school counseling field. Facilitator B has more than five years of experience in practicing self-compassion, providing self-compassion workshops, and researching self-compassion in the school counseling field. The facilitators used the same implementation procedures for both workshops. Facilitator A led Phase One (or the first part of the training). Facilitator B led the self-compassion experiential activities of the second phase, while both facilitators, jointly, led the third phase. First, participants were guided through the informed consent process. Second, participants engaged in the project by completing the Self-Compassion Scale and the School Counselor Leadership Survey. Third, participants experienced an interactive experiential workshop on school counselor leadership dimensions and self-compassion techniques.

Phase One. This experience began with the presentation of a real-world scenario of a school counselor undertaking a stressful leadership activity (assisting students during a school shooting) within the school. After introducing this scenario, Facilitator A presented the participants with the following prompt: “Imagine you are the school counselor; describe the inner thoughts and feelings of the school counselor (or what could possibly be going on within the mind of the school counselor at this moment).” This prompt assisted in providing participants with an opportunity to present their background knowledge or working definitions of leadership, engaging in stressful leadership behaviors, and identifying specific self-coping skills, or lack thereof. The Socratic discussion that ensued helped to prepare the participants for the remainder of the workshop. Following the Socratic discussion, the participants were introduced to the evolution of the concept of leadership in the school counseling field, the link between stress and leadership practices, and background research culminating in the school

counselor leadership dimensions (i.e., professional efficacy, interpersonal influence, resourceful problem solving, systemic collaboration, and social justice advocacy—see the Defining School Counselor Leadership section). After they had learned about the school counselor leadership dimensions, participants were asked to reconsider the initial prompt in light of this new knowledge. The purpose of this task was to enable participants to build on their previous knowledge by integrating awareness of new language or vocabulary that would improve their conceptualization and identification of leadership behaviors (along with the unintended related stress) within school counseling contexts.

Phase Two. Next, participants were introduced to the concept, components, and definition of self-compassion. Afterward, Facilitator B led the participants in mindful breathing and discussion before guiding them through five different self-compassion interventions from the literature (see training and development section): self-compassion break, soothing touch activity, soften/soothe/allow, loving-kindness meditation, and compassionate letter-writing (Neff, 2011; Neff & Germer, 2013). Once the first self-compassion technique had been fully experienced, Facilitator B debriefed the participants. The purpose of the debriefing was to enable the participants to process any changes, resistance, or epiphanies induced by the experience. A similar debriefing was conducted following the completion of each intervention.

Phase Three. Once the final debriefing had been conducted, Phase Three began with the participants given an opportunity for independent practice. The participants were given a handout that described self-compassion interventions and a handout that presented review notes for the information presented thus far. Participants

were also given a handout that included a real-world scenario concerning a school counselor assuming a leadership role with a focus on planning, collaboration, and coordination. Based on the given scenario, the participants responded to short-answer questions related to leadership dimensions, possible stress or discomfort of the school counselor in the scenario, preferred self-compassion techniques for the particular situation, and the explanations and rationale underlying the selections made. Once the participants had completed their individual tasks, a large group-processing discussion took place. Following this discussion, the participants were given an opportunity to work in small groups. In these groups, the participants developed their scenarios (based on their own school counseling experience), explained their scenarios through leadership dimension(s), outlined the possible stress or discomfort that might accompany engaging in the leadership behavior, and explained the benefits of using their preferred self-compassion technique(s) or intervention(s). Finally, the small groups reported back to the large group for final processing. Once the participants had been debriefed with regard to their overall experiences with learning the new information and engaging in the interactive activities and exercises based on real-world scenarios, the participants were given the opportunity to complete the post-surveys for the SCS and the SCLS.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to explore the specific variables of each research question. Mean difference scores were used to compare the pre- and post-training groups. Because of the series of inference tests planned to address the research comparison questions, a Bonferoni adjustment on the level of significance was adopted (in other words, $\alpha = .01$, rather than $.05$ (Huck, 2012; Gravetter & Wallnau,

2013)). An initial examination of the assumption of normality for the comparison tests using the Shapiro-Wilks approach indicated that normality was not met for more than five of the 11 related tests. This is typically due to a few extreme scores appearing on some of the subscales. Due to the relatively small sample size of the present study, the authors relied on the Monte Carlo simulation findings documented by Zumbo and Jennings (2002) in respect of the robustness of the t-test for related samples and carried out needed analyses to address research questions one and two. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software, the researchers proceeded to conduct a series of t-test procedures to examine the mean differences between the pre- and post-sample scores on the related leadership practices subscales, or dependent variables (i.e., interpersonal influence, systemic collaboration, resourceful problem solving, professional self-efficacy, and social justice advocacy), thereby examining the impact of the workshop on school counselors' levels of awareness of leadership behavior. To examine the mean differences between the pre- and post-sample scores on the related self-compassion subscales (i.e., self-kindness, self-judgment, mindfulness, over-identification, common humanity, and isolation), the researchers performed an additional series of t-tests to examine the impact of the workshop on school counselors' levels of self-compassion using a .01 level of significance.

Before the research questions were examined, an a priori analysis of power was conducted to enable appropriate sample size determination. Because of the nature of this study, the researchers pre-established an effect size of .35 (small-to-moderate effect size), an alpha level of .05, and a power greater than .90. Meanwhile, even for

sub-scores that reported attrition of respondents, power analyses using the G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) software indicated adequate sample size levels using alpha levels no lower than .05, beta levels no lower than .90, and effect sizes no greater than .35. The results generated by the G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) software indicated that an appropriate sample size to meet these requirements entailed the recruitment of no fewer than 72 participants. All of the effect sizes were generated using Cohen's d .

Results

Comparisons Between Leadership Practices Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Given that the developers of the leadership scale allowed for a composite overall score, a comparison of the total or overall score before and after the workshop intervention yielded a statistically significant mean difference: $t(53) = 4.60$, $p < .001$, and an overall effect size of $d = .63$. The results obtained for the counselors who participated in this professional development workshop session, focusing on their perceived levels of leadership practices and views across specific subscales (e.g., influence, collaboration, and resourcefulness), indicated significant positive gains for all the subscales. Table 1 presents these results using the difference scores for the mean, 99% confidence intervals, and effect sizes.

With the exemption of the Social Justice subscale, all the other subscales on the SCLS yielded t-test mean difference scores higher than 4.10 with degrees of freedom no lower than $n = 61$, all p-values lower than .001, and an effect size no smaller than .51, or a medium effect. Thus, for these four subscale scores, on average, participating counselors and supervisors reported larger gains in their leadership perception of selves after the intervention.

Comparisons Between Self-Compassion Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Initial examination of the workshop participants in relation to their overall total scale scores before and after the workshop yielded a non-statistically significant result: $t(65) = -0.02, p > .10$. Because of the total scale scores, the item composition of the scale itself, and the possible canceling effects, it was necessary to examine the individual responses at the subscale level. According to the creator's confirmatory factor analyses of the self-compassion scale, there is indeed evidence "that the subscales could be examined separately...depending on the interest of the researcher" (Neff, 2016, p. 266; Neff et al., 2018). For the current study, our aim was to explore whether the intervention had any impact on both self-compassion and any of the coping strategy components that make up self-compassion, to assist with adding insight to the education and development of school counselors' coping strategies. The following findings were obtained for this study.

The results for the self-compassion subscales indicated that several of these subscale scores yielded marginally significant statistical differences. For example, the self-kindness and mindfulness difference scores exhibited positive gains after the workshop, with a $t(68) = 2.26, p < .05$, and an effect size of 0.27; and $t(63) = 2.50, p = .015$, and an effect size of 0.31, respectively. However, these results did not reach the selected adjusted alpha of .01. At the same time, the self-judgment and over-identification difference scores indicated negative gains after the workshop, with a $t(69) = -1.58, p > .05$, and an effect size of 0.19; and $t(68) = -1.42, p > .05$, and an effect size of 0.17. Thus, the only scale that may have reached a marginal level of significance

was the mindfulness subscale with a moderate effect size but still with the possibility that the true parameter may include zero. See the 99% confidence interval in Table 2.

Discussion and Implications

Research-Informed Training

Previous researchers have provided evidence that school members who take on leadership responsibilities find it helpful to practice self-compassion for working through the stress that comes with engaging in leadership practices (Frank et al., 2015; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011; Rufa, 2018). Researchers have also shown that individuals who are aware of their leadership engagement exhibit higher levels of self-compassion (Horton, 2017). In fact, school counselors who have knowingly taken on leadership roles report that it is necessary to practice self-compassion (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). However, research has also made it clear that more training and development is needed to develop an awareness of the leadership practices school counselors engage in (Dollarhide et al., 2008; Gibson, 2016; Young et al., 2015), as well as awareness of self-compassion techniques to assist with coping with the occupational stress that comes with engaging in leadership practices (Horton, 2017; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011; Todd & Hiba, 2019). The purpose of this study was to provide a meaningful contribution to the gap in the research and literature, specifically with regard to the training needs of leadership awareness and the awareness of coping strategies (particularly self-compassion) for practicing school counselors. The provided workshop incorporated education and experiential activities as recommended by various authors in the professional literature related to school counselor leadership behaviors and self-compassion coping strategies (see Table 3).

Discussion of the Findings and Implications

As outlined, the recommendations, suggestions, and findings from the literature provided a meaningful and significant training. Understanding the research that informed the training is beneficial for discussing the findings for each research question. Research question one asks for the examination of participants' perceptions of awareness of school counselor leadership and the dimensions associated with it before and after the workshop. The findings indicated that, as a result of the workshop, the school counselors' awareness of their leadership practices appears to have increased in all areas (i.e., interpersonal influence, systemic collaboration, resourceful problem solving, professional self-efficacy, and social justice advocacy). A strong argument can be made that by increasing their awareness of their leadership behaviors, school counselors can "strengthen" their "leadership skill set" (Young & Bryan, 2015, p. 13). It is clear that this finding shows additional promise for the recommendations and findings of the authors and researchers discussed in this section regarding the development and training of school counselors in leadership (Harms et al., 2017; Shillingford & Lambie, 2010; Young & Bryan, 2015).

Research question two asks for the examination of participants' perceptions of awareness of self-compassion and the coping strategies associated with self-compassion before and after the workshop. The findings of the study associated with research question two indicate that during the workshop the overall self-compassion levels among school counselor participants do not show a significant increase, though their awareness did seem to move in the expected direction for the compassionate and uncompassionate aspects of self-compassion. In respect of the subscales or associated

coping strategies, the school counseling participants appear to have become slightly more kind and mindful toward the self (i.e., self-kindness and mindfulness) instead of being self-critical and over-exaggerating the self (i.e., self-judgment, over-identification). By becoming more self-aware, learning, and engaging in coping strategies associated with self-compassion, school counselors convey the impression that they become better able to “regulate emotions and navigate awareness of both positive and negative aspects of the self, others, and the environment” (Irving et al., 2012, p. 66). These findings may help to “yield new insights into how self-compassion functions at a more detailed level of analysis” (Neff, 2016, p. 271). They also provide more insight into the training and development recommendations and ideas relating to self-compassion techniques suggested by researchers (Germer & Neff, 2013; Neff, 2011; Neff & Germer, 2013). For instance, Neff and Germer (2013), found more significant results than did the study at hand; however, this is most likely due to the fact that they provided the intervention over the course of eight weeks rather than a much shorter, three-hour and thirty-minute training. This implies that if the training at hand was extended, there is a possibility that participants’ self-compassion would have shown a continued significant increase.

Limitations

As with most research studies, this study is not without limitations. The limitations of this study include the following: the study’s use of self-reporting instruments, the failure of some participants to complete all of the surveys, survey administration errors, and variance. The findings of this study are based on the assumption that participants completed each instrument or survey honestly and that participants were not sensitized

to the intent of the study (e.g., positive emotions associated with the opportunity to attend the training and or interactions with the facilitators). In addition, because the post-measurement in the current study occurred immediately after the treatment (or workshop), there is the possibility that any impact may be short term. The researchers who conducted the current study accept this possibility.

Furthermore, although the participants are primarily bilingual Hispanic females, the study did not consider race or ethnicity. It is possible that culture may have played a role in the results of the study at hand. For instance, regarding the Self-Compassion Scale, Neff (2016) stated that a limitation of the scale is that “some groups of people struggle with certain aspects of self-compassion more than others” (p. 271). However, these “groups of people” are not clearly identified in Neff’s study (p. 271).

Consumers of this manuscript are advised to keep these facts in mind, especially with regard to generalizing the results of the present study. Moreover, not all participants fully completed all of the surveys (primarily the post-surveys). While this is not uncommon in survey research, a reasonable explanation for many of the unanswered survey items in this study is that counselors may have left early to return to their schools and help their staff end the school day (see the subsection entitled “Participants”), possibly at the request of their administrators. Since school counselors needed the approval of their administrators to attend the workshop, it is possible that more school counselors may have wanted to attend but were not permitted; these school counselors may have given different responses than the school counselors who attended and participated in the study. Furthermore, a small number ($n=8$) of the post-surveys included administration errors, which led to missing or incomplete responses.

The errors did not, however, significantly impact the findings of this study. In fact, the appropriateness of the sample sizes for the two research questions appears to have remained within the acceptable ranges, wherein the obtained results are deemed valid. Although these limitations are important, the researchers believe that this study and its results offer direction and promise for researchers, practitioners, and counselor educators or workshop leaders (see the subsection entitled “Recommendations and Conclusion”).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Despite this study’s limitations, it is clear that the facilitators trained participants on the subject of school counselor leadership skills and self-compassion as coping strategies. The findings also suggest a means of increasing school counselors’ awareness of leadership behaviors while also increasing aspects of their self-compassion awareness. This study contributes to the current body of research and provides context for the formulation of recommendations for researchers, school counselor educators, workshop leaders, and practicing school counselors. For instance, researchers could go a step further by identifying school counselors who perceive themselves as leaders and readily admit to implementing self-compassion coping strategies on the job and exploring how these counselors perceive the impact of self-compassion coping strategies on their leadership practices and their overall job satisfaction. It would be helpful to consider sample size, sample diversity and the duration in time and weeks for which school counselors practice self-compassion coping strategies. Meanwhile, school counselors would benefit from intentionally engaging in self-compassion professional development and implementing self-compassion

interventions in their leadership practices, especially those that they perceive as stressful. To assist school counselors in their pursuit of professional development, it would be helpful if school counselor educators and district leadership provided more research-informed self-compassion professional development workshops or training. It would also be beneficial to consider the duration of time the professional development dedicates toward the practice of self-compassion coping strategies. All in all, it is clear that school counselors, whether they realize it or not, are often tasked with leadership responsibilities, and self-compassion interventions may assist them in their efforts to fulfill these responsibilities over time.

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Appendix

Table 1

Descriptive and series of one-sample t-tests results for the Leadership practices subscales mean differences (post-test-pre-test) scores.

Subscale	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d	Lower 99% CI	Upper* 99% CI
Influence	2.14	4.21	4.10	64	.000	0.51	0.753	3.524
Collaboration	1.71	3.12	4.46	65	.000	0.55	0.692	2.732
Resourceful	2.49	4.22	4.82	66	.000	0.59	1.123	3.862
Efficacy	1.25	2.34	4.41	67	.000	0.53	0.498	2.002
Social Justice	0.54	1.71	2.63	67	.011	0.32	-0.004	1.092

* Lower and upper 99 percent confidence interval for each test confirms the probability of the true parameter of a mean difference of zero or not.

Table 2

Descriptive and series of one-sample t-tests results for the Self-Compassion Scale subscales mean differences (post-test-pre-test) scores.

Subscale	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d	Lower 99% CI	Upper* 99% CI
Kindness	0.80	2.93	2.26	68	.027	0.27	-0.0137	1.731
Judgment	-0.63	3.33	-1.58	69	.118	0.19	-1.681	0.424
Humanity	0.53	2.25	1.94	67	.057	0.24	-0.196	1.255
Isolation	-0.75	2.56	-0.24	66	.812	0.29	-0.904	0.755
Mindfulness	0.62	2.00	2.50	63	.015	0.31	-0.040	1.290
Over-Identified	-0.51	2.97	-1.42	68	.161	0.17	-1.456	0.441

* Lower and upper 99 percent confidence interval for each test confirms the probability of the true parameter of a mean difference of zero or not.

Table 3*Activities and Supporting Literature per Phases*

Phases	Activities	Supporting Literature
Phase One	<p>Facilitator A started with a scenario based on a real event of a school counselor helping her students during a violent school crisis.</p> <p>Participants provided responses regarding what they might do if they found themselves in the same situation.</p> <p>Facilitator A presented and explained the leadership dimensions (as well as the stress element) and guided a discussion to allow the participants to apply this background information to the scenario presented earlier. More specifically, participants identified which leadership dimensions best described the actions of the school counselor in the scenario and the emotional stress the school counselor might have felt. Afterward, Facilitator A handed over the workshop to Facilitator B to address more of the emotional stress issues, using self-compassion as a coping strategy.</p>	<p>Facilitator A incorporated Harms et al.'s (2017) recommendation to include a stress element in leadership training.</p> <p>The brainstorming activity allowed the participants to present their background knowledge and helped the facilitator to guide the discussion toward a clarification of leadership as "what school counselors do as a practice as opposed to a position" (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010, p. 215).</p> <p>Young and Bryan (2015) encourage professional development workshop leaders to "help school counselors identify" the five dimensions of school counseling leadership (p. 43).</p>

Phases	Activities	Supporting Literature
Phase Two	<p>In Phase Two of the training, Facilitator B incorporated meditations and practical techniques for everyday use.</p>	<p>These methods of teaching self-compassion were influenced by Neff (2011) and Germer and Neff (2013), as well as Neff and Germer (2013). The idea was to “provide participants with a variety of tools to increase self-compassion” (Neff & Germer, 2013, p. 31).</p>
	<p>Facilitator B opened with some background information and an explanation of self-compassion.</p>	<p>Facilitator B’s explanation included, “why it is necessary for wellbeing”, especially when engaged in leadership practices (p. 31) or “difficulties as they arise in their lives” (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 859).</p>
	<p>Before getting into the primary experiential exercises, Facilitator B began with a mindful breathing technique. This activity served as an anticipatory method to prepare participants for the remaining activities or techniques.</p>	<p>The mindful breathing technique that Germer and Neff (2013) call “affectionate breathing” (p. 859).</p>
	<p>Facilitator B encouraged participants to share their experience of the mindful breathing activity to prepare them for the remaining activities.</p>	<p>The discussion helped to foster “a safe...respectful atmosphere” for all participants (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 859).</p>
	<p>The facilitator continued in the same manner, facilitating one-to-one discussions and opening the room for sharing and discussion after each of the five primary activities or techniques (see the procedure section for the five techniques).</p>	<p>Throughout the sharing and discussion of these techniques, Facilitator B made clear that this practicing of each self-compassion technique may be used after engaging in stressful workplace situations (Todd & Hiba, 2019; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011).</p>

Phases	Activities	Supporting Literature
Phase Three	<p>After the sharing and discussion of the last self-compassion activity, Facilitator A began Phase Three of the training, which was later finished with the assistance of Facilitator B.</p>	<p>Phase Three included Dollarhide et al.'s (2008) findings that indicated that it is important for school counselors who engage in leadership practices to practice "self-reflection", take the "opportunity to grow both personally and professionally", and "consult" with other practitioners (p. 267).</p>
	<p>After reading the scenario, participants individually identified leadership dimensions, provided a rationale for their decisions, identified possible stress-related indicators, selected a preferred self-compassion intervention that he or she might implement to assist with the stress, and lastly identified the associated benefits. After completing and processing these tasks individually, each counselor had the opportunity to share their findings with the group and process these collaboratively.</p>	
	<p>The participants then worked in small groups of three or four, sharing their own stories of engaging in leadership practices, identifying leadership dimensions they use, and discussing the related stressors and the ways in which certain self-compassion techniques may have been beneficial throughout their leadership experiences. Eventually, the small groups shared back to the large group for further discussion and consultation with each other based on their experiences.</p>	<p>Borders and Shoffner (2003) recommend "providing professional development", which involves school counselors envision putting "into action their unique knowledge and skills" and addressing their occupational frustrations as "effective leaders" (p. 60).</p>